



Republican Policy Committee

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The Current Government "Shutdown": Pin the Blame on the Donkey, Where It Belongs

One constant in the Clinton Administration is to blame others for its own faults. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the President's attempt to pin the blame for the current partial-government shutdown on Congress.

The reason the government is partially shut down is because President Clinton has vetoed the legislation that would have kept the government running under normal budget procedures. Further, President Clinton continues to refuse to be a participant in the effort to produce a balanced budget. Instead of allowing the budget process to go forward, the President is subverting it by relying on extraordinary means of temporary funding mechanisms in order to avoid reducing the deficit.

While President Clinton is playing the "blame game" for political advantage, the majority party in Congress is trying to balance the budget.

Clinton Vetoes the Government Shut

Yesterday, President Clinton read a litany of programs affected by the shutdown.

- ▶ In virtually every instance, these programs would be operating if he had signed the funding legislation that Congress sent him. Instead, he vetoed three appropriations bills (Interior, Commerce/Justice/State, and VA/HUD) and shut down the very programs he is now mourning.
- ▶ Those vetoes account for the adverse impact on 620,000 of the 750,000 furloughed federal employees.
- ▶ In the case of Medicare contracting and some Medicaid functions, the funding for these programs is being prevented from reaching the President's desk by members of his own party in the Senate, who refuse to allow the Labor/HHS appropriations bill to come to a vote.
- ▶ Further, Congress has taken special action to address the President's specific concerns over Medicaid funding, and can be expected to continue to do so.

Clinton's Vetoes Mirror His "Three E's" Campaign Strategy

The President vetoed the bills funding hundreds of federal programs and hundreds of thousands of government employees for purely political reasons. It is now well understood that Clinton's three presidential campaign wedge issues — the elderly, education, and the environment — are worked into every possible speech and public action, including his vetoes of these bills. As Robert Samuelson noted in his opinion piece in the December 27, 1995 *Washington Post*: "Contrary to popular impression, President Clinton has mainly caused the two government 'shutdowns'. . . In short, the budget battle has mostly been a charade, orchestrated by Clinton to frame his reelection."

- ▶ **FY 1996 funding for the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies:** Most of the reasons the President gave for vetoing the bill were trumped-up environmental concerns. [For a detailed discussion of the reasons that President gave for vetoing the Interior funding bill, see RPC paper, "Clinton's Reasons for Vetoing Environmental Funding Bills Do Not Hold Water," 12/22/95.] It is now evident that the President wants to keep the national parks closed while placing the blame on Congress.
- ▶ **FY 1996 funding for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies:** The President attempted to justify his veto as necessary to protect public health and the environment by demagoguing the modest Republican funding reductions in this bill over last year's amounts (saying it "would roll back decades of bipartisan environmental protection,"). However, his environmental fear-mongering lacks substance [see above cited RPC 12/22/95 paper].
- ▶ **FY 1996 funding for the Departments of Commerce, Justice, State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies:** The President apparently thinks it is better to shut down three cabinet departments, the federal courts, and 20 independent agencies, cripple the nation's ability to combat illegal immigration and drug smuggling — rather than let a local government decide it wants to spend its anti-crime federal assistance dollars on an upgraded crime lab or bulletproof vests for police. In vetoing this, the President cited his objection to local control of police priorities, specifically his concern for merging his "Cops on the Beat" program with a larger \$1.9 billion block grant program. The only issue here is whether or not states and localities should have their anti-crime priorities dictated by Washington.
- ▶ **FY 1996 funding for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies:** Senate Democrats are filibustering this bill over a provision that would prohibit the President from circumventing the courts and barring companies that use replacement workers from receiving federal contracts — a practice that has been legal for six decades.

Clinton Refuses to Let the Budget Process Go Forward

The appropriations bills the President has vetoed are part and parcel of the budget process. Not only has he stopped it in the particular instances of his vetoes, he has not allowed the overall budget process to progress by reneging on his agreement to submit a true balanced budget plan. He promised to do this as long ago as June 1992 when he was running for president: *"I would present a five year plan to balance the budget"* [Bill Clinton, *Larry King Live*, 6/4/92]. And, less than two months ago, he signed legislation stating that he would submit a real balanced budget.

"The President and Congress shall enact legislation in the One Hundred Fourth Congress to achieve a unified balanced budget not later than the fiscal year 2002 as scored by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office."
[House Joint Resolution 122, signed by the President November 20, 1995]

- ▶ In four budget proposals to Congress offered in 1995 alone, President Clinton has not produced a single one that ever balances.

Clinton Playing Games, Not Running the Government

President Clinton has decided he would rather play political games than either run the government or balance the budget. He apparently hopes that, as in the children's party game, he can securely blindfold the American public and spin them around so thoroughly that they do not know where the blame should be placed — instead of having it pinned on the donkey, where it belongs.

- ▶ Clinton has vetoed the bills that would put government programs back to work four times (the three aforementioned FY 1996 regular appropriations bills, as well as H.J. Res. 115, a continuing funding resolution).
- ▶ Clinton and his allies in the Senate are preventing another funding bill from even reaching a vote.
- ▶ Aside from these particular bills, Clinton has refused to allow the overall budget process to progress by refusing to submit a real balanced budget plan despite his pledge to do so.
- ▶ Instead, Clinton wants to continue operating the government under the extraordinary procedure of continuing resolutions to avoid reducing the deficit.

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